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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000278

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/06/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [QA](#)  
SUBJECT: QATAR'S MINISTER OF STATE OFFERS VIEWS ON GCC+2  
AND THE REGION

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael A. Ratney,  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Al-Mahmoud encouraged NEA A/S Welch over lunch April 1 to proceed with current U.S. thinking on the GCC 2 summit and urged him to include a discussion of Kosovo on the agenda. He described Qatar's relations with Saudi Arabia as "good" following Prince Sultan's recent visit, expressed disappointment at the Lebanese cabinet's decision to prohibit the prime minister from attending the Arab League Summit, and said Qatar would like to see a thaw in Algerian-Moroccan relations. Al-Mahmoud stressed the need for Palestinian unity, especially if a lasting agreement with Israel is to succeed; favored engagement with Hamas; and encouraged support for moderates as a means to undermine extremists. He also said Qatar would take a look at providing financial support to Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria, but that the Iraqi government should also contribute to the well-being of these displaced citizens. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ahmed Al-Mahmoud, joined by Qatar's Ambassador-designate to the U.S., Ali bin Fahad Al-Hajri, hosted a working lunch April 1 for NEA Assistant Secretary David Welch. Charge, P/E Chief, and NEA Staff Assistant also attended. A/S Welch outlined for Al-Mahmoud U.S. ideas for strengthening and institutionalizing the GCC 2 dialogue. At the next GCC 2 meeting, he suggested releasing a joint statement that would focus on relations and principles, as opposed to the discussions themselves on all regional issues "without exception," and sought Al-Mahmoud's advice. Without directly addressing relations and principles, Al-Mahmoud responded that a "general statement" focused on the topics of discussions, but without details, struck him as a good idea. Al-Mahmoud added that the statement should reiterate that the participants have not changed their position on any issues. He warned A/S Welch that the UAE would want to address Iranian territorial claims on islands in the Gulf, and the U.S. should be prepared for this issue, which A/S Welch noted the UAE successfully raised at the recent Arab League Summit in Damascus.

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SAUDI ARABIA, LEBANON, AND NORTH AFRICA  
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¶3. (C) Asked about Qatar's relationship with Saudi Arabia following the Saudi Crown Prince's recent visit, Al-Mahmoud said the relationship was now "good," and Prince Sultan left "happy." Turning to the recent Summit in Syria, Al-Mahmoud said it was a mistake for the Lebanese Prime Minister not to attend. Al-Mahmoud told A/S Welch, "He would have shown himself as a legitimate leader" and should have taken full advantage of the opportunity to deliver from Damascus a televised speech, which the Syrians themselves would have been obliged to broadcast. Al-Mahmoud said the Lebanese cabinet's decision in this regard was unfortunate. On the

Maghreb, Al-Mahmoud told A/S Welch Qatar would like to see improved Algerian-Moroccan relations because, absent a thaw, "the situation in North Africa will remain frozen" in time and place. A/S Welch responded by noting that if Secretary Rice at some point travels to North Africa, she may try to organize a meeting of regional foreign ministers.

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PALESTINIAN SITUATION  
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¶4. (C) Al-Mahmoud, referencing overnight press reports that President Abbas had acknowledged that all issues, including Jerusalem, were under discussion with Israel, asked A/S Welch to elaborate. A/S Welch said Israeli FM Livni and her Palestinian counterpart, Abu Alaa, were meeting 2-3 times weekly with no publicity and that the U.S. was urging quick movement toward a complete agreement with intermediate steps to be taken by both parties. A/S Welch said the very fact we have negotiations in 2008, unlike 2007, is a good sign. Maintaining calm in Gaza, though, is essential to keeping the discussion on track. If Egypt will reduce smuggling and control its part of the border, Israel has said it could ease up on the closure of Gaza. The other essential ingredient, continued A/S Welch, is for Palestinian rocket attacks to stop. Egypt would continue to address these issues with Hamas.

¶5. (C) Al-Mahmoud noted that Qadhafi urged Palestinian unity at the Arab League Summit, and in this case he was right. A/S Welch cautioned that the U.S. and Europe would not react positively if Abbas moves to open discussions with Hamas. Israel wants security. Al-Mahmoud countered that Arafat did what the international community requested of him by

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recognizing and negotiating with Israel, but he died under siege. Al-Mahmoud said there is an expression in Arabic, "If you don't get everything, don't lose everything." He said this had been the mistake on the Palestinian side. Al-Mahmoud said building up moderates is essential to success. If the impasse continues, there will be more extremism on both sides.

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RECOGNIZING KOSOVO  
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¶6. (C) Turning to the Balkans, A/S Welch asked Al-Mahmoud to explain the Arab approach on Kosovo. Noting no Arab state had recognized it, he recalled that at the time of the wars in the Balkans the Arabs sought Western intervention, and the U.S. stepped in and saved a threatened Muslim population. Why now, asked A/S Welch, do Arab states not recognize Kosovo? Al-Mahmoud said he believes the time has come to recognize Kosovo and that the U.S. should be proud of its actions in the Balkans. Al-Mahmoud said the OIC Summit in Senegal agreed to "eventual recognition" of Kosovo, but he could not explain the resistance to doing something now. He opined that perhaps states were concerned about setting a precedent for renegade regions to break away. Al-Mahmoud encourages the U.S. to put this issue on the agenda of the GCC 2 Summit.

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IRAQ  
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¶7. (C) Al-Mahmoud told A/S Welch Qatar has a better relationship with Iraq now than it did in the past. The Amir met with Shiite Vice President Adil Abdul-Mahdi at the Arab League Summit in Damascus for what Al-Mahmoud characterized as "frank discussions." He said the Iraqi Government has a problem with Al Jazeera's coverage, like most everyone else in the region. Al-Mahmoud said Qatar's primary concern is having all Iraqis share power in the government. As the

situation improves, it will be easier for Qatar to open an embassy in Baghdad. A/S Welch underscored that while the Iranian President had visited Iraq, not a single Arab head of state had done so. This was not in the Arab interest. Al-Mahmoud said A/S Welch was absolutely right. The Arabs needed to play a bigger role. When Qatar first sought to open an embassy in Baghdad, said Al-Mahmoud, the U.S. could not provide security guarantees. Another problem, according to Al-Mahmoud, was Arabs' reluctance to donate money for Iraqi humanitarian assistance because they are afraid their names will be put on an international list that prohibits their travel to the U.S., Europe, and elsewhere. The Iranians, he observed, do not have this fear and are winning points with the Iraqis by providing assistance.

18. (C) A/S Welch stressed the pressing need to restore Arab interest in Iraq and Iraqi interest in being Arab. He urged Qatar to take another look at official visits and said the visit of the Iranian President to Baghdad was embarrassing for the Arab states of the region. Al-Mahmoud said the Arabs need U.S. help. A/S Welch encouraged Qatar to look seriously at helping to increase Arab influence in Iraq. One area where Qatar could help is providing assistance to Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria. Al-Mahmoud responded that the Arab League had taken the decision in Damascus to help the Jordanian and Syrian governments. He added that the Iraqi Government should help, too. A/S Welch said the U.S. would encourage matching Iraqi contributions, and Al-Mahmoud said the Iraqi Government has money to spend on fulfilling its responsibilities to displaced Iraqi citizens.

19. (C) Noting that Qatar had not made a contribution to the Palestinians through the Arab League since June 2007, A/S Welch encouraged Qatar to contribute again. Al-Mahmoud acknowledged that Qatar had not made a contribution in 2008, but he emphasized that Qatar had met and exceeded its Arab League obligations, having contributed 50 million USD (5 million above and beyond the 45 million obligation). A/S Welch noted that Qatar's overall support of the Palestinians put it at the top of the list alongside Saudi Arabia and the UAE for 2007, but no money has gone since June of 2007. The U.S., which contributed 150 million USD in late March, nonetheless hoped Qatar could do more to support the Palestinian Authority, concluded A/S Welch.

110. (U) A/S Welch has cleared this message.

RATNEY